

STATUS: Endangered (32 FR 4001-March 11, 1967; 35 FR 8495-June 2, 1970; 58 FR 5657-January 22, 1993) with critical habitat (43 FR 20938-May 15, 1978).

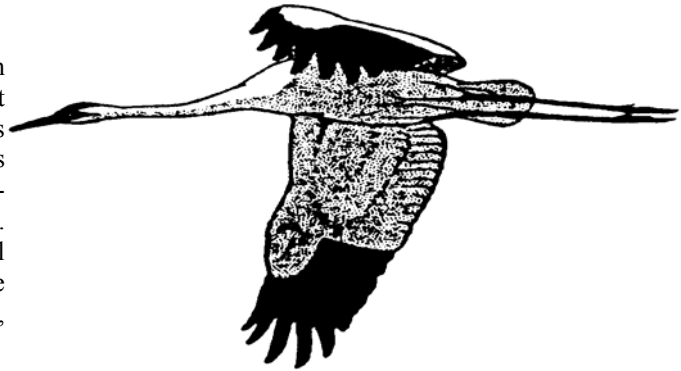
CRITICAL HABITAT: In Texas, a designated area of land, water, and air space including the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge (Aransas, Calhoun, and Refugio Counties).

DESCRIPTION: Tallest American bird; males approach 5 feet tall. A very large, snowy white, long-necked bird with long legs that trail behind in flight, black primary feathers (at wing tips), a crimson crown, and a wedge-shaped patch of black feathers behind the eye. Males are generally larger than females.

HABITAT: Marshes, river bottoms, potholes, prairies, and cropland. Premier winter habitats are marshes, tidal flats, uplands, and barrier islands. Migratory habits vary, with croplands used for feeding and primarily palustrine wetlands are used for roosting. Water depth at roost is usually less than 10 inches, the majority between 1 and 6 inches deep. Cranes rarely use densely vegetated wetlands.

DISTRIBUTION:

Present: Breeds in isolated, marshy areas in Wood Buffalo National Park, Northwest Territories in Canada. Uses stopover areas in the central and eastern panhandle of Texas during migration (southward in October-November, northward in March-April). Winters primarily in the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and adjacent areas of the central Texas Gulf Coast (Aransas, Calhoun, and Refugio Counties).



Historic: Originally found throughout most of North America. In the 19th century, the main breeding area was from the Northwest Territories to the prairie provinces in Canada and northern prairie states to Illinois. A nonmigratory flock existed in Louisiana, but is now extinct. Wintered from Florida to New Jersey along the Atlantic coast, along the Texas Gulf Coast, and in the high plateaus of central Mexico.

THREATS AND REASONS FOR DECLINE: Destruction of wintering and breeding habitat, collisions with power lines and fences, shooting, specimen collection, and human disturbance.

OTHER INFORMATION: Recovery team appointed in 1976. Original recovery plan (1980) was revised in 1986. Also protected by Canada and Mexico. Intensive captive-breeding program conducted by both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service. Whooping cranes feed on small grains in agricultural fields, green forage, aquatic plants, insects, crustaceans, and small vertebrate animals. Nests are normally of bulrush, less often of sedge. Whooping Cranes migrate as singles, pairs, family groups (normally three) or in small flocks, sometimes in the company of sandhill cranes. Crane populations have increased from 18 in 1938-39 to 133 in 1994. Twenty-five survive in the Kissimmee Prairie, Florida, where FWS began in 1993 an experiment to establish a wild non-migratory flock. Ninety-five exist in captivity and the young produced are released in the wild in the Florida reintroduction.

REFERENCES:

- Allen, R.P. 1952. The Whooping Crane. National Audubon Society, New York, NY. 246 pp.
- Edwards, R., S. Brechtel, R. Bromley, D. Hjertaas, B. Johns, E. Kuyt, J. Lewis, N. Manners, R. Stardom, and G. Tarry. 1994. National Recovery Plan for the Whooping Crane. Report No. 6. Ottawa: Recovery of Nationally Endangered Wildlife Committee, 39pp.
- Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS). 1987. Canadian Whooping Crane Recovery Plan. Minister of Environment, CWS, 56pp.
- Howe, M.A. 1989. Migration of Radio-marked Whooping Cranes from the Aransas-Wood Buffalo Population: Patterns of Habitat Use, Behavior, and Survival. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), Fish & Wildlife Report 21, 33pp. and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 415pp.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1994. Whooping Crane Recovery Plan. USFWS, Endangered Species Office, Albuquerque, NM. 92pp.